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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ULAANBAATAR 000232

STATE FOR EAP/CM AND H, PASS TO JOHN LIS AND MARGARITA SEMINARIO AT  
HDAC AND TO CRS

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [OREP](#) [MG](#)

SUBJECT: HDAC STAFF WITH CODEL PRICE PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL  
PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICE IN MONGOLIA

11. (SBU) Summary: Representative David Price led a Congressional Delegation to Mongolia on June 29-30, as part of the House Democracy Assistance Commission's (HDAC) engagement with Mongolia, which began in 2006. Congressional Research Service (CRS) and HDAC staff members held concurrent meetings and training sessions focusing on fostering the professionalism of the Mongolian parliamentary secretariat and establishing an effective, professional and non-partisan research service. Embassy Ulaanbaatar organized a full agenda of concurrent meeting with Members of Parliament, leaders of the Parliamentary Secretariat, and members of Mongolia's newly established parliamentary research service. The Secretariat and the Mongolian research service staff expressed appreciation for the visit. Secretary General of Parliament, Sharavdorj, stated his interest in additional training for parliamentary staffers, in signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the CRS, and in gaining access to the CRS research materials. Sharavdorj invited the head of CRS and CRS representatives to a longer visit to Mongolia. End Summary.

12. (SBU) HDAC staffer Margarita Seminario led the staff contingent of CODEL Price. She was joined in the staffer program by Clay Wellborn, Sherry Shapiro, and Bruce Vaughn of the Congressional Research Service. They began their program by participating in a full delegation discussion session on the importance of parliamentary research with select members of Parliament, including Vice Speaker G. Batkhoo and key Parliamentary secretariat staff. The staff delegation spent the remainder of their sessions meeting with different offices and members of the Parliamentary Secretariat and concluded their visit with a substantive training session hosted by Seminario for the staff of the Mongolian parliamentary research service.

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BACKGROUND ON PARLIAMENT  
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13. (SBU) Mongolia has a unicameral parliament often referred to as the State Great Hural. Parliament has 76 members from four political parties and one independent. Each member is elected to a four-year term from a single-seat constituency and has a small support staff. The parliament is active for about six months of the year and is supported by a Secretariat that reports to the Speaker of Parliament. The Secretariat is headed by Secretary General Sharavdorj, who oversees the nine divisions of the Parliament. Six of the divisions have policy implications including (1) Foreign Relations, (2) Press and Promotion, (3) Legal, (4) Assembly/Standing Committee Support, (5) Office of the Standing Committees, and (6) the Center for Policy Analysis, Research and Public Relations (including the Parliamentary Library). There are three additional

administrative divisions.

14. (SBU) The primary focus of the delegation was the Center for Policy Analysis, Research, and Public Relations (CPA) which is roughly equivalent to Congressional Research Service of the U.S. Congress. The Mongolian Parliament established the center in 2009, which now has 30 staff, almost all of whom have graduate degrees. The staff is well educated but relatively young and not particularly specialized. The Center provides research -- primarily comparative international analysis -- at the request of parliamentarians or standing committees. This is the sixth attempt to establish a parliamentary research service since 1990. The CPA recently laid off 25 percent of its staff as a result of the Mongolian budget crisis, but the Center now appears to have a more stable bureaucratic and administrative base and has gained wider support among parliamentarians.

15. (SBU) Nonetheless, the center is still struggling to establish itself as a trusted, non-partisan research service and better to integrate itself with the work of the parliament. In particular, the center must improve its coordination with standing committees and identify research requests earlier in the process of drafting and debating legislation. The center is also hampered by limited foreign language skills which are essential to requesting international comparative analysis. Finally, the CPA needs to develop expertise in developing and packaging information and analysis in ways that are more practical for parliamentarians and their staff.

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OUTCOME OF INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

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16. (SBU) After the initial plenary meeting with the Members of Congress and Parliamentarians, Congressional staffers met with Sharavdorj, the General Secretary of Parliament, along with several of his colleagues to discuss challenges the Secretariat faces. They also focused on ways to improve training and increase the professionalization of the staff. Sharavdorj requested that CRS consider passing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Secretariat and the CPA to improve capacity and eventually conduct joint research. In particular, he stressed the need for additional training for CPA staff, including both Washington-based training and CRS-led training in Mongolia. The areas for additional training, according to Sharavdorj, included survey methodology and improved language skills. Sharavdorj also noted the Secretariat is looking to explore improved cooperation with the World Bank research team. The staff delegation promised to relay the request for an MoU back to the CRS director and to the HDAC committee, but expressed interest in exploring ways for further mutually beneficial cooperation. Sharavdorj closed the meeting by extending an invitation to the head of CRS to come to Mongolia for a longer visit.

17. (SBU) In the afternoon session, CPA Director Dr. Tsedenragchaa Norovdondog and her deputy met the staff delegation and visited the parliamentary library. Participants identified the following key areas for improvement: 1) Improve coordination between the CPA and parliament, especially early on in the policy process; 2) The CPA must better tailor its materials to the needs of parliamentarians and make materials more user-friendly; and 3) The CPA needs to cooperate more effectively and share responsibilities with standing committee staffers.

18. (SBU) After discussing these questions, staff member Seminario raised the possibility of CPA staffers participating in a ten-day HDAC legislative training session in Washington later this year. She also suggested that CPA contact the International Parliamentary Union, which may be able to provide further training and access to materials. In particular, Seminario recommended that Norovdondog contact the head of inter-parliamentary relations who is responsible for networking with parliaments around the world.

19. (SBU) The final session held on June 30 was substantive training

for the full staff of the CPA and library by CRS and HDAC staffers. CRS staffers focused on (1) the importance of clearly identifying the needs of the audience through frequent discussion with the target audience (staffers and Members of Parliament) both before and after the research product is produced; (2) developing products that are easy to use and yet substantive; (3) the need for research to be free of personal bias and to present the key arguments from all sides; and 4) the need for the CPA to cultivate a reputation for being responsive to the needs of all parties and for being strictly professional and non-partisan. Finally, CRS staff discussed the possibility of sharing access to CRS research materials with the parliament and the CPA. The CPA expressed great interest in exploring this option and for further trainings.

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CONCLUSION AND COMMENT  
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110. (SBU) The Mongolian Parliamentary Secretariat is anxious to continue cooperation with the HDAC and faces the challenge of becoming a professional, non-partisan support service to the parliament. Key elements of this challenge are the lack of effective analysis, inadequate packaging of research materials, and limited language abilities and other specialized skills whose absence hampers the staffers' ability to provide essential comparative research and analysis. However, the current budget constraints and bureaucratic uncertainty are distractions to the CPA, as is the center's expectation of foreign assistance. The CPA could more effectively address these challenges through additional efforts within Mongolia or through visits to other parliamentary research services with structure and context more similar to those of Mongolia. However, there is much room for targeted assistance from CRS and HDAC, which could be regularized through a Memorandum of Understanding to provide access to CRS materials and foster training opportunities for key managers. Post is eager to support these efforts and welcomes additional such visits that promote Mongolia's democratic development.

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